

Remarks of Edwin Walker
Honored by NCBA with the First
Samuel J. Simmons Achievement Award
December 13, 2005

Thank you all for coming. I am really quite overwhelmed by all of this. What an incredibly touching moment.

Each of us has a responsibility to advocate based on the opportunities presented to us.

- Some have opportunities by virtue of our positions.
- Others have opportunities by virtue of the people we come in contact with and have the ability to influence.

I believe it was Dr. Dorothy Height who spoke at Sam's funeral about the "measure of a man," and the measure of a great man – Sam Simmons. She spoke about how he was a "quiet giant" and a keen strategist; one who was ever focused on the goal and who kept his eye on the prize; one who never waived in his pursuits. He was reliable, dependable and tenacious. He was a visionary – imagining the possible, and not only taking the steps, but making the steps when they were not there toward creating the possible, and making a new reality for the future.

In terms of my interactions with Mr. Simmons...

I recall many conversations – that were more like counseling sessions – with Sam about how do we influence and change things:

- How do we make a difference in the lives of older African Americans and other minorities, and especially those who are low-income?
- How **do** we make a difference? What do we do? What **could** we do? What **should** we do?

- What was our responsibility to aid in ensuring and developing or advocating for equal access to available and affordable housing and services and funding that would enable people to stay at home, in their communities, and to have a good quality of life - and have that life in a manner that made them feel comfortable and welcomed, and honored as elders in our society?
- What was our responsibility to overcome a history of under-representation and discrimination and health disparities?

I was blessed that Sam took me under his wing and would say: Edwin, I have an idea – you know we need to do this (or I want you to do this). Now, how do we do it? What language do we need to change? Who are the people we need to speak with? How do we influence them? Let's think about our obstacles, our opposition, how we overcome and effect change, and how we can convince them and convert them to our position.

He would say – **Edgar** (Cahn), **Larry** (Crecy), **Dave** (Affeldt), **and I** have been thinking about this, and I want to know what you think. We would then discuss the strategy – the pros and cons, the folks who wouldn't support it and why. Then we'd chart out how each of us with different strengths and different opportunities to influence could advance the agenda.

- **Sam** would call his contacts and allies in the Leadership Council, the Congress, and the Administration.
- **Larry** would be released to be the “laser beam” and “cut through” all the opposing views with tremendous passion.
- **Dave** would be dispatched to speak with as many groups as possible and speak about gaining support and momentum.
- **And I** would work internally, within my boundaries and constraints, crafting a plan, advancing the message and convincing others to do the right thing.

Sam was like the father in this scenario – a guiding light and a wise sage who brought others to his understanding by encouraging them to see the issues in a way that was real and significant for them.

Sam was indeed a “quiet giant,” but one who knew **how**, and **where** and **when** NOT to be quiet – He knew **how** to be effective.

He ***was, is, and always will be*** a tremendous inspiration for me and for each of us. We should all strive to find that which has been placed before us to accomplish, not for ourselves, but:

- For others;
- For those in need;
- For those with less access and less opportunity; and
- For those who deserve our honor, our respect, our dedication and our service.

It was for them that Sam focused his efforts and dedicated his life - we should as well. I would like to thank God for charting a path for me where I “fell into the field of aging.” It was not my plan, but has become my passion.

I want to thank Karyne – had I known what this really was I would have told her she couldn’t do it. Thank you as well to the Board and staff of NCBA. This is an overwhelming and incredibly humbling honor. It is a huge mantle, laden with responsibility - one I am not worthy to receive, but one I am inspired by and am motivated to wear.

I want to thank my many friends and colleagues in the aging field who have supported me. I know that the road to success is paved with partnerships. Without you and your dedication toward advancing our common goals, we could not make progress.

I want to thank Josefina Carbonell, the Assistant Secretary for Aging, for the opportunity I have currently to advance the agenda. She has always been a passionate advocate and one who enables me to have access and opportunity to influence policy and programs for all older people in this country.

Lastly, I want to thank my family of relatives and friends who are my foundation – who are loving and supportive –

- My daughter – the love of my life -- Jennifer and her husband, Reggie, who came here tonight and surprised me.
- My Aunt Theresa – who is here representing my mother. It was her vision and leadership within our family that instilled in us a sense of understanding of the issues, a sense of responsibility and a sense of acting, rather than merely tolerating the status quo. She has always been active with the NAACP and back in the earlier days of the civil rights movement, with the SCLC. Her experiences, witnessed through our eyes embedded a sense of advocating and advancing the causes that are ***right*** and ***fair*** and ***just***.
- On this occasion, I also think of my grandmother, and I'm sure my brother, Don -- the real rock in our family -- would attest that we were instilled with a healthy dose of respect and love for our elders. We were taught to honor and respect them. We were taught that they have given and sacrificed for us and that they deserve to have us give our best back on their behalf.

Thank you Sam Simmons for giving your best and thank you NCBA for this incredible honor.

This text is the basis of the oral remarks of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Aging. It should be used with the understanding that some material may be added or omitted.